

OPINION

# Editorial: Erie's decision on drilling a thoughtful step forward

We hope a state oil and gas force takes a cue from the town, which sought to allow drilling to proceed while protecting public health.

***By The Denver Post***

POSTED: 09/02/2012 12:01:00 AM MDT [6 COMMENTS](#)

UPDATED: 09/02/2012 01:03:46 AM MDT

Rather than buckle to pressure from the anti-drilling crowd, the town of Erie last week reached agreements intended to allow two companies to proceed with drilling *and* protect public health and safety.

While some residents asked trustees to extend a drilling moratorium, town officials instead took a thoughtful step forward on the issue. For that they should be commended.

That said, we do worry that Erie's effort sets the stage for what could be a hodgepodge of local rules that make things more difficult for energy companies than they should be.

That's why we're eager to see recommendations from a Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission task force that has been examining drilling in populated areas. The COGCC oversees drilling in the state.

In the absence of state rules, cities up and down the Front Range have been looking for ways to manage or regulate drilling as more and more companies target the Niobrara shale formation.

Much of the debate centers around unsubstantiated claims about groundwater contamination from hydraulic fracturing, which involves pumping water and chemicals into the earth to free oil and natural gas. But legitimate concerns have been raised about air quality and whether setbacks — currently state law requires drilling to be at least 350 feet away from homes — should be extended.

Longmont has passed regulations that have brought a lawsuit from the state, which asserts that the rules interfere with the COGCC's role as the sole regulator of drilling in Colorado.

Voters in Longmont will be asked this fall to pass an outright ban on fracking in town limits.

Boulder County, having realized that it cannot ban fracking, is instead [pushing land-use regulations](#) that essentially ask drillers to "First, do no harm." (Yes, it leaves us scratching our heads, too.)

Considering those efforts, it's easy to praise [Erie's approach](#), which place tough but legal restrictions on amenable drillers.

But we favor a set of statewide regulations that give certainty to industry and provide appropriate environmental safeguards. Let's hope that the COGCC task force provides something along those lines later this month.